

MEET A BEE GEE — No. 2

by Nick Logan

ONE otherwise nondescript morning to the clatter of an alarm clock bell, young Robin Gibb awoke, arose and Lo! the world was round and Lo! it rained every day. Now I know and you know (and Manchester readers know in particular) that it rains every day and we all know (Flat Earth Society members here close your eyes) that the world is round. But please be patient.

Anyway, as if all that wasn't mind-boggling enough, Robin had previously accomplished the amazing feat of making good his escape back to Massachusetts by the simple trick of taking a boat to England where, astute listeners to phonographs and steam radio will remember, he did all the things he wanted to do.

Couch cent

Now all this would seem to make Robin a cert for a psychiatrist's couch, or at least prime contender for the title, "Nut Of The Year"! However, he's a very happy and contented Bee Gee indeed.

Still baffled? Then you haven't been reading your Bee Gee songbook. For the lazy and illiterate, Robin will explain: "We always try to put ourselves into our records. We've never tried to write anything that wasn't us. What we are doing is sort of writing down people's thoughts: nobody has ever thought of writing down things exactly the way people think."

"Massachusetts, in fact, is not talking about people going back to Massachusetts. It represents all the people who want to go back to somewhere or something. It is all about people who want to escape."

Does it represent Robin and the Bee Gees? "No, not now. It did. But we have already gone back to Massachusetts. When we were not recognised we were trying to escape—to recognition. That is something we have always wanted. We came to England searching for it and we found it."

"Now 'World', our new record, is the next step and is completely different from 'Massachusetts'. It's about somebody who knows everything about the world and the story line now is, 'Where will I be tomorrow?'"

"It says: 'Now I've found that the world is round and of course it rains every day.' He knows what it's all about and has learnt to live with it and accept it. That is completely us. We have found that the world is round and that it rains every day. We've found peace of mind and now we're very happy."

Eighteen-year-old Robin, older than his twin Maurice by one hour, indeed looked very happy when I met him amid the tiger skin rugs and hunting trophies in Robert Stigwood's exotic Mayfair "den".

Scattered round the room, the rest of the Bee Gees were coping with a queue of interviewers, who every now and again would rise, trot across the tigers and leopards, and change partners like a game of musical chairs.

Robin sank his slight frame into the soft settee, shook his shaggy brown hair, lit a king-size cigarette and prepared to answer my questions, jumping on to each one and expounding at length, punctuating each phrase and grinning profusely.

Set him off

I touched on the subject of song-writing and that set him off. "We get ideas for songs everywhere and anywhere. It's a telepathy type of thing with us, sort of written in the mind."

Intrigued, I asked him to explain. "I suppose it's because we are so close as brothers, not like most brothers. It's pretty scary at times and it's not just confined to music. Barry and I can be walking along a street together when we just start singing the same song in the same key at the same time."

"It can be frightening but we never talk about it to each other in case we put a mental block on it. But we are very grateful for it; we wouldn't like it to go."

"It's incredible really. We get the same chords running through our minds. Barry will chance on a tune and my mind will go for the same thing. All of a sudden he looks at me and we know we are on the same wavelength. It can happen anywhere."

"Ninety per cent of it is mental telepathy. 'Massachusetts' is an example. I had had this line in my mind all day: 'The lights all went out in Massachusetts.' Later that night I mentioned to Barry and he said: 'Yes, I know. I've already got the tune for it.' So we wrote the rest of the words together and Maurice did the arrangement."

It all sounded like something straight out of the columns of "Psychic News," but before the sceptics take up their bludgeons it is a known fact that very close relatives can at times think along the same wavelength.

Undoubtedly, the three brothers are close and Robin demonstrates this by continually talking in terms of "we" and "our" instead of "I" and

"mine". Nevertheless, it must go down as one of the strangest song-writing methods in pop history.

We turned to more down-to-earth facts about the Bee Gee who describes himself as very temperamental, very creative, a bit of a hypochondriac, slightly neurotic, inclined to be lazy in the mornings with a dry, goonish sense of humour.

By an odd quirk of fate, Robin, like his brothers, was born in Douglas, Isle of Man. The date: December 22, 1949. "Mum and Dad, who lived in Manchester, used to spend their holidays at Douglas and it happened that each time they went they were expecting one of us!"

Robin's schooling was spent at such romantic sounding places as Oswald-road School, Chorleton-Cum-Hardy, and Cavendish-road School, Manchester. "I went back there and looked in last week, just reminiscing. It's probably all changed now, anyway."

Spelling

"I used to love spelling, history, chemistry and astrology. I'm still keen on spelling and astrology. I was interested in the way people spelt things. You know how everybody spells in their own way." I didn't know, but anyway...

He continued: "I still read a lot about the planets and follow the space race closely. I used to hate maths and music. I was a complete and utter failure at that. We feel music, and there is no feeling when you have to learn."

"Maurice and I sang in the school choir at Christmas carol concerts and when it came to 'God Save The Queen', we'd sing together and throw the whole choir!"

Robin warmed to the story of the Bee Gees. In November 1956 we were chasing Barry on a bike along Buckingham Road in Manchester and we were talking about these kids who used to sing at the Gaumont Theatre at Saturday matinees.

"We used to watch them every week and we thought: 'Why can't we do something like that?' There were five of us, Maurice and Barry and myself, and Paul Frost and Kenny Oricks. There was a record out at the time called 'Wake Up Little Susie' by the Everly Brothers and we thought we'd mime to that. We called ourselves the Rattlesnakes."

"The Saturday morning came, just before Christmas, and we were going up the stairs of the Gaumont when Barry dropped the record! It smashed. We thought: 'Great Everlys! What are we going to do?' Barry had a guitar, which he had taken along to help the miming, and he suggested that we go out and really sing."

"So out we went and sang 'Lollipop' by the Mudlarks, and it went down well. We ended up doing five more, including 'That'll Be The Day', 'Book Of Love' and 'Oh Boy'—and that was how the Bee Gees began."

Paused

Robin paused for breath, lit another king-sized cigarette, and continued: "Our next date was at the Walley Range Odeon, when Maurice and I added banjos. Then we did the Palentine Theatre as Wee Johnnie Hayes and the Bluecats—Barry was Johnnie Hayes. We got £5 a week for our act. This was in 1958 and we went on doing matinee performances for about two years. Then we left Manchester and

emigrated to Australia when I was ten. We thought up the name the Bee Gees on the boat and also started writing our own material. We lived in Brisbane, where I went to a secondary school, and after about a year started the group again.

"We played the Speedway Circus in Brisbane and met a racing driver, Bill Good, who introduced us to a deejay friend of his. We did some tapes for his show. He played them and used to get a tremendous number of orders for them but they weren't released as records."

"Then we got on to television in Brisbane in 1960 with our own show, 'Cottie's Happy Hour', and we got very big in Brisbane. The three of us played Surfer's Paradise at the Beachcomber Hotel for six weeks, three shows a night."

"Then we went to Sydney, which was like going to London, and did the Sydney Stadium in 1962 with Chubby Checker. It was the biggest break we ever had."

"The first song we ever wrote was 'Let Me Love You.' Our first song-writing success was 'Starlight Of Love', which was recorded by Col Joye and got to No. 1. We became an overnight success but our first hit didn't come until 1965, although the Bee Gees were always big TV-wise."

"Our first hit was 'Wine And Women', a group song, which got to Number 10. We followed that with three complete flops. The first, 'I Was A Lover, A Leader Of Men', won an award for the best composition of the year but it wasn't a hit."

"We then met Bill Shepherd who came to England with us as musical director and Ossie Burn, our producer. We were on Spin label and used to record until seven in the morning. 'Monday's Rain', our first for him, was an absolute flop. Our next, 'Cherry Red'—again, an absolute flop."

Desperate

"In August 1966 we went into the studio desperate to get a hit before we left for England. We made this song, 'Spicks And Specks', but Spin didn't want to release it. They thought we were finished, a financial loss. However, it was released eventually and went to the top in four weeks. On January 3, 1967, when we left it was a No. 1 hit."

"It had been in our minds for the past years to come to England. 'Spicks And Specks' gave us the money."

Two welcome cups of tea appeared before us and I gave my hard working pen a well-earned chance to cool off. Tea put away, Robin picked up the story.

"When we first came over here we went to see a man—who shall be nameless to save him embarrassment—at the Grade Organisation. He practically threw us out of his office and said we were wasting our time. 'When the Seekers came in here I knew they were going to do something but you are just another group,' he told us. 'Pause for that short-sighted gent to kick himself.'"

"Then Robert Stigwood began to take an interest and was ringing our house every twenty minutes. When he finally got in touch I was the one who picked up the phone. We went to see him and he wanted to do business. He took us over and since February we have never looked back. We would give Robert the world now. He's done wonders for us."



ROBIN GIBB